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Raymond Adam Ciafarone Jr.

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POSITIONING THE 1913 PATERSON SILK WORKERS'  
STRIKE WITHIN A DIALECTICAL FRAMEWORK

by

Raymond Ciafarone

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2021

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Positioning the 1913 Paterson Silk Workers' Strike within a Dialectical Framework

by

Raymond Ciafarone

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date

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Karen R. Miller

Thesis Advisor

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Date

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Elizabeth Macaulay

Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## ABSTRACT

### Positioning the 1913 Paterson Silk Workers' Strike within a Dialectical Framework

by

Raymond Ciafarone

Advisor: Dr. Karen Miller

This thesis places the 1913 Paterson Silk Strike within a dialectical framework by historically surveying the constant motion of industry in Paterson, New Jersey. It follows the dialectical method by examining the 1913 Paterson Silk Strike not as a singular event but as one part of a continuous historical process. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a group of investors introduced capitalism to Paterson and completely transformed the social relations of production from a mostly self-sufficient agrarian existence to a center of capitalist manufacturing. From that moment forward, production in Paterson was in a constant state of flux as mills, shops, and factories were built, abandoned, and reoccupied by new companies who often modified the buildings for different commodities. The 1913 Paterson Silk Strike is historically linked to the 1912 Lawrence Strike to reveal that although the Lawrence Strike was a success and the Paterson Strike a failure, both cities eventually suffered similar fates of manufacturing flight in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Placing the 1913 Paterson Silk Strike within this dialectical framework reveals that the single strike was one demonstration of a long, continuous struggle between labor and capital in Paterson.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At thirty-five years old, my educational experience began attending Hudson County Community College in Jersey City, New Jersey. Now, here I am submitting a master's thesis to the Graduate Center almost a decade later. It was an incredible journey because of all the great students, professors, and staff I have met. I only wish my grandmother, who passed away in April of 2020 from COVID, were here so that I could give her the good news. During the last year, I deeply missed her random calls to see how I was doing and ask how my paper was coming along. Grandma was always in my corner.

My partner Dolores will surely miss telling me to “just finish it already,” but I am sure there will be something new on the horizon. Thank you.

Lastly, my advisor, Professor Karen Miller, is the only reason I am here writing this acknowledgment for my thesis. I knew I had found a great future thesis advisor in my first semester at the Graduate Center in a course with Professor Miller, but a health issue forced me to take a leave of absence for a year. Professor Miller was the one who helped me immensely with getting back into the MALS program. As a coach/advisor who always motivated me to write as soon as we finished talking, I cannot thank you enough for your patience and understanding during this process.

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## Introduction

It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness.

—Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859.<sup>1</sup>

On January 31, 1914, twenty-three-year-old Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a vital member of the Industrial Workers of the World, or I.W.W., presented a speech in New York City that analyzed the 1913 Paterson Silk Workers' Strike. In the address, given nearly a year after the strike in Paterson began in February 1913, Flynn spoke to detractors who criticized the I.W.W.'s management of the strike. After six long months, the strike failed to win a settlement for the twenty-five thousand Paterson silk workers. Since the critics were persistent and "becoming more and more vicious," Flynn decided to address the detractors, not individually, but, in Flynn's words, "theoretically."<sup>2</sup> In the speech, Flynn asked a crucial question that has hounded labor struggles since the early stages of capitalism: "what is a labor victory?" Flynn's answer combined theory and praxis and stated that the striking worker must struggle for better working conditions by demanding them from the capitalist owners. However, the union must also educate workers about the continuous labor struggle inherent within the capitalist mode of production. In other words, the class consciousness generated by the strike must be further developed by a workers' union, like the I.W.W., so that when the worker returns to work, whether in victory or defeat, they recognize the continuous struggle against the capitalist mode of production.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, "The Truth about the Paterson Strike" (speech in New York City on January 31, 1914), in *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology*, ed. Joyce L. Kornbluh (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1964), 215.

This paper follows the theme of education conveyed by Flynn in the speech and moves it up to the present. Educating the working class did not stop with the end of the Paterson strike and must continue while the capitalist mode of production exists. The 1913 Paterson Silk Workers' Strike still has plenty to offer in these terms. When a librarian first suggested the 1913 Paterson Silk Workers' Strike at New York University's Tamiment Library a few years ago, my knowledge of labor unions, Marxism, and the Industrial Workers of the World was limited. I knew the nickname for the I.W.W., the Wobblies, and that they sang songs, but this was as far my knowledge went. Also, I had never heard of the 1913 Paterson Silk Workers' Strike. I was instantly captivated when I first read about the preceding successful strike led by the I.W.W. in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912. Afterward, I read of the failure of the strike in Paterson in 1913. The labor historians contrasted and compared both strikes and the different methods and ideologies of the competing labor unions such as the American Federation of Labor, or A.F.L. and the I.W.W. This historical analysis contested my previously held notion that all labor unions were the same. I discovered a history of conflict and contradictions among the unions and the socialist political parties. The strategic disagreements regarding electoral politics also seemed especially politically relevant in the last four to five years here in the United States. The larger-than-life figures of the I.W.W. such as Bill Haywood and Elizabeth Gurly Flynn added an almost movie-like experience to the story. However, these figures also overshadowed some of the more theoretical qualities of the strike that I hope to bring to the forefront here, which is why I studied and applied basic Marxist theory to the strike. This way, I hope to share what I learned about Marxist theory and the strike with the reader.

There is an abundance of previously produced knowledge about the 1913 Paterson Silk Workers' Strike. I agree with Anne Huber Tripp, author of one of the monographs about the

strike, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913*, who began the book with “the Paterson silk strike of 1913 has been grist for many an historian’s mill.”<sup>3</sup> The strike was often examined, with the title of Tripp’s book as a textbook example, through the framework of the union that directed it, the I.W.W. The primary history books on the I.W.W. such as Melvin Dubofsky’s, *We Shall Be All* and Eric Foner’s, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States: The Industrial Workers of the World 1905-1917*, included chapters on both the 1912 Lawrence Strike and the 1913 Paterson Strike. The significant figures who were, directly and indirectly, involved with the I.W.W. recounted the events in their writings and writings about them.

In this paper, I removed the strike from the strict context of the I.W.W. and placed it within the dialectal framework of capitalism. To accomplish this goal, I felt that starting from the beginning when capitalism first arrived in Paterson, New Jersey, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was necessary. In the first section, I presented a summary of the foundations of capitalism and the history of manufacturing in Paterson. In the subsequent sections, I presented a brief history of silk production in the United States and manufacturing, in general, to show that the Paterson Silk Workers’ Strike of 1913 was but one event in the totality of the history of labor struggles against capitalism. Throughout the paper, I grounded the narrative with the dialectical method and the progression of capitalism. David Harvey defines the dialectical method as everything “in motion, in contradictions, and transformations.”<sup>4</sup> What is uncovered by this abstraction is that the early 19<sup>th</sup> century workers, the 1912 Lawrence workers, the 1913 Paterson workers, and even the workers of today are all subjects to the same laws and contradictions of the capitalist mode of

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<sup>3</sup> Ann Huber Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), ix.

<sup>4</sup> David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital: The Complete Edition* (New York: Verso Books, 2018), 14.

production. These factors, when combined within the totality of capitalism, continually create similar issues and problems.

The ‘why the strike failed’ thesis engaged by previous historians effectively answered the questions of failure. However, it offers a partial description of the totality of the conflict in Paterson and the workers' struggle overall. A dialectical approach builds on the foundational work of these past historians of the Paterson Strike. Their work focused on the relations between specific members and groups from the strike without fully engaging with the capitalist mode of production. A broader picture emerges by linking the strikes before 1913 and those that continued long after in Paterson. The 1913 strike appears as a particular segment of this ongoing labor struggle. As stated in the preamble to the I.W.W. constitution (and similarly in Marx’s writings), this struggle continues “until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth.”<sup>5</sup> While the Paterson silk workers' effort failed without material rewards, their battle was not a complete failure. The reflection of the history must be that the loss in Paterson did not make the strike hopeless. This paper transforms the strike into an educational tool by putting the strike in the proper dialectical context of history and capitalism.

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<sup>5</sup> “Preamble to the IWW Constitution,” [iww.org](https://www.iww.org/culture/official/preamble.shtml), accessed October 27, 2020, <https://www.iww.org/culture/official/preamble.shtml>.

## Chapter 1

### *The Foundations of Capitalist Production in Paterson*

“Labor conditions in the American silk industry have a special relation to the technical developments and the expansion of the market...The geographical location of the industry in the United States has a direct relation to the labor employed. It is more influenced by labor than any other factor...The improvement and simplification of machinery and the consequent displacement of skilled by unskilled labor changed the entire seat of the industry from New Jersey to Pennsylvania.”

—Shichiro Matsui, *The History of Silk Industry in the United States*, 1930.<sup>1</sup>

"The lower strata of the middle class—the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants—all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which modern industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialized skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population."

—Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848.<sup>2</sup>

It is helpful to understand the evolution of the factory system in Paterson, New Jersey, by analyzing the historical process of capitalist production in the area through a Marxist lens. The rise of industrial manufacturing in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the development of the capitalist mode of production, which, according to Marxist theory, altered the earlier forms of production to the capitalist model, were interconnected, and Paterson was both an earlier model and prime example of this transformation in the United States. Capitalist production in Paterson began in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with the manufacture of cotton goods. At that time, the fabrication of textiles was an example of this shift in manufacturing in Paterson as individual producers in a home or

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<sup>1</sup> Shichiro Matsui, *The History of the Silk Industry in the United States* (New York: Howes Publishing Company, 1930), 1, HathiTrust, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.c008793588&view=1up&seq=7>.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Engels and Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (New York: New York Labor News, 1908), 10. Kindle edition.

on a farm produced textile goods mainly for their use and not for sale. The capitalist mode of production transformed the agrarian economies to economies of hired workers manufacturing commodities in a shop or factory, which were sold for profit by the owner of the means of production.<sup>3</sup> Starting this analysis with the historic shift in textile manufacturing and applying it to the history of Paterson supports the argument regarding the 1913 Paterson Strike, which was that capitalism, even in its earliest form, was dialectical or constantly in motion.

In Paterson in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, silk factory owners “revolutionized the instruments of production” by implementing a new loom system that started significant strikes. However, when the foundations of capitalism in Paterson are analyzed, we see that these ‘revolutions’ were continuous since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when a new “epoch” materialized and completely changed the social relations of the people who lived there.<sup>4</sup> The constant motion of capital caused the abandonment of this old way of life in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. That continuous movement inevitably led to the vast departure of manufacturing from Paterson in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The dialectical method where everything is “in motion, in contradictions, and transformations” formed the basis of this analysis, which builds on the earlier histories of the factory systems and overall labor process in Paterson.<sup>5</sup>

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a group of investors led by Alexander Hamilton coordinated this shift in economic development in Paterson by transforming the small Dutch village near the Great Falls of the Passaic River into one of the first manufacturing centers in the United States.

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<sup>3</sup> “So too does the capitalist mode of production emerge historically from the growth of commodity production.” Ernest Mendel, introduction to *Capital: Volume I of the Penguin Classics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 14.

<sup>4</sup> “The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.” Engels and Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> David Harvey defines capital as “not a thing, but rather a process that exists only in motion.” David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital: The Complete Edition* (New York: Verso Books, 2018), 14.

During the American Revolution, as the Continental Army crisscrossed New Jersey, Hamilton, serving as the aide-de-camp to General George Washington, passed through the area of modern-day Paterson and observed the seventy-seven-foot-tall waterfall on the Passaic River. It was then that the future first Secretary of the Treasury purportedly first imagined transforming the area around the Great Falls into an industrial manufacturing site. Hamilton worked as a leading figure in forming the Society for the Establishment of Useful Manufactures, or S.U.M., in 1791, only a few years after the ratification of the United States Constitution in 1788. The S.U.M., a private, state-sponsored corporation made up of investors, was created to promote industrial development in the area and, eventually, throughout the nation.

The story of Alexander Hamilton at the Great Falls, envisioning the future of manufacturing after the American Revolution, fit well with the future Secretary of the Treasury's plans for the new nation. In the Federalist Papers, a series of articles that encouraged support for the United States Constitution, Hamilton "offered an expansive view of prosperous American merchants, farmers, artisans, and manufacturers, all working together" in a united country instead of independent confederacies.<sup>6</sup> George Washington supported this vision and wore a plain brown suit of "superfine American Broad Cloth" to the first Inauguration in 1789. With the material fabricated in Hartford, Connecticut, the 'American' suit symbolized the new nation's manufacturing ambition. Washington reportedly said at the time that it would soon be unfashionable for the men of the new country to wear suits other "than one of American manufacture."<sup>7</sup> However, Thomas Jefferson did not share Hamilton and Washington's visions of an economy based on large-scale manufacturing in the United States. Jefferson famously

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<sup>6</sup> Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 255. Kindle edition.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 876. iBook.

“perpetuated a fantasy of America as an agrarian paradise with limited household manufacturing.”<sup>8</sup> And while this fantasy applied to a small Dutch village near the banks of the Passaic River in New Jersey, Jefferson’s reality was that of a Southern plantation economy built around slavery, which was the opposite of a ‘paradise’ for the enslaved population.

The area around Paterson was an idyllic portrayal of agrarian life before the construction of the S.U.M. textile mills near the Great Falls. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Dutch colonists seized land that belonged to the Acquackanonk tribe, who were part of the Native American group of Lenape. The Dutch of Acquackanonk village transformed the area into farmland and utilized most of their crops and livestock. Apart from a few specialty items like tea and sugar from the ‘outside,’ the villagers were largely self-sufficient. Traveling artisans would come into the village at certain times of the year to craft and fix shoes or weave the farmers’ raw materials such as "flax or wool into cloth."<sup>9</sup> This picturesque representation of a Dutch village began to change slightly by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century when land in the area became more and more difficult to attain for the newer generations. Many of the adult children of the Dutch farmers became artisans such as "carpenters, millers, stone masons, and shoemakers."<sup>10</sup> However, the village remained isolated from the broader economy as the inhabitants continued agriculture production until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Harris stated, "whatever manufacturing took place in the area went almost exclusively for immediate use rather than for sale."<sup>11</sup> We shall see that the village of Acquackanonk was a

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<sup>8</sup> Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 348.

<sup>9</sup> Howard Harris, “The Transformation of Ideology in the Early Industrial Revolution: Paterson, New Jersey: 1820-1840” (PhD diss., City University, 1985), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Harris, “The Transformation of Ideology,” 4.

<sup>11</sup> Harris, 5.

fitting example of the revolution in the production process when investors introduced capitalist manufacturing to the area in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

As described, the economy of the Dutch village of Acquackanonk centered around agriculture and produced items per their needs. The Society for the Establishment of Useful Manufactures, on the other hand, was something completely different. It was a group of investors who came from outside the immediate area. This group of wealthy ‘Americans’ sought out an ideal location to build a factory for the sole purpose of making profits from the commodities produced by workers whom they employed. For example, the investors would hire someone to plan the construction of the mills and shops. This director would then hire workers to build the structures. With the structures built, workers, ideally with skills in textile manufacturing, were then sought out and brought in from outside the village to fill positions left open by the local population. The following article explained in detail a general plan for this process.

The capitalist process began in Paterson with an article in *The American Museum* from April 1791, titled “A Brief Examination of Lord Sheffield’s Observations on the Commerce of the United States of America.” A 1917 essay on the S.U.M. cited the article and stated that it was “the first published suggestion looking toward the organization” of the corporation.<sup>12</sup> The 1791 article, quoted in the following, was an attempt to promote the idea that “the first judicious European capitalists” could take advantage of “good situations in the United States” by establishing “manufactories” with “labour-saving machines.” It called on “the owners of... inactive wealth” to turn that wealth into capital (capital is value, or wealth, in motion) by investing in “cotton mills, wool mills, flax mills, and other valuable branches of machine

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Stancliffe Davis, *Essays in the Earlier History of American Corporations, Essay III, The “S.U.M.”: The First New Jersey Corporation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), 350, HathiTrust, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044010634764&view=1up&seq=374&skin=2021>.

manufacturing.” The article's author instructed their audience on how to draw in other investors and secure loans to “purchase 500-1,000 acres of land...erect works” and “raise a valuable town.” It ends with the promise that by creating a few of these “establishments,” they would bring “profit into the United States.”<sup>13</sup> The article described the foundations of capitalism in Paterson, and these plans would soon become a reality.

The Society for the Establishment of Useful Manufacturers, a group of leading political and business leaders of New Jersey and New York, met for the first time in New Brunswick, New Jersey, on November 28, 1791. There they elected directors of the society and formed a committee to scout ideal locations for a system of mills and workshops that would produce goods made from cotton by using waterpower from canals and raceways to power the looms. Hamilton was directly involved in the operations of the Society and hired a few workers who reported that the Great Falls on the Passaic River was the leading site compared to other locations scouted on the Raritan River and Delaware River. Therefore, in May of 1792, the Society met and decided to begin their manufacturing venture in Paterson. They commissioned members to survey and purchase the surrounding land of seven hundred acres and met at the Great Falls with Hamilton in July of 1792 to finalize the project.<sup>14</sup> After a few failed attempts at hiring a director, one being the designer of Washington D.C., Pierre Charles L’Enfant, the investors settled on a director of operations, Peter Colt. Colt supervised building a canal, or raceway, that brought water to power the cotton mill by damming the Passaic River. Colt was also responsible for overseeing additional essential structures like a printing mill and housing for

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<sup>13</sup> Tench Coxe, *A Brief Examination of Lord Sheffield's Observations on the Commerce of the United States in Seven Numbers: with Two Supplementary Notes on American Manufactures* (Philadelphia: Printed by Carey, Stewart, and Co, 1791), 21, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0107693357/ECCO?u=cuny\\_gradctr&sid=primo&xid=536fd0eb&pg=18](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0107693357/ECCO?u=cuny_gradctr&sid=primo&xid=536fd0eb&pg=18).

<sup>14</sup> Morris William Garber, “The Silk Industry of Paterson, New Jersey, 1840-1913: Technology and the Origins, Development, and Changes in an Industry” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 1968), 4-7.

employees. By 1794, the mill was operating with approximately one hundred and twenty-five workers working dozens of looms and other cotton spinning machines.<sup>15</sup> While the foundations of the project were complete, problems soon emerged for the S.U.M.

Although the directors managed to set in motion this early capitalist project in Paterson, the S.U.M. would fail after only a couple of years as nearly every aspect of the production process proved challenging. Securing the necessary funds for the raw materials and fabricating the machinery were all contributing factors that led to the termination of the venture.<sup>16</sup> However, problems with the labor process were also a significant issue. These complications led to the abrupt downfall of the S.U.M. and are therefore relevant to this paper. The lack of a large skilled labor pool in the United States forced the company to search for skilled textile workers in Europe, but these efforts ultimately failed.<sup>17</sup> The S.U.M. relied on a collection of primarily unskilled workers who were also impoverished because of the low wages paid out by the mill owners. Housing also became an issue because the workers could not afford to build their own houses even after the company offered them some free building materials like stone and bricks to get them started. The Society even established a Sunday School for the working children. However, keeping the children enrolled in the school became challenging because “the parents were so poor and the wages of the children so low” that attending the school was too difficult.<sup>18</sup> This early attempt at capitalist manufacturing in Paterson in the 1790s revealed issues with the new technology, the skill levels of the workers, the importation of workers from outside the area,

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<sup>15</sup> Garber, “The Silk Industry of Paterson,” 9-11.

<sup>16</sup> Harris, “The Transformation of Ideology,” 11.

<sup>17</sup> Garber, 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> Harris, 12.

and low pay creating poor living conditions for the workers. Variations of these same issues continued in Paterson and across the country as capitalism continued to expand.

This early attempt at the capitalist mode of production by the S.U.M. in Paterson revealed matters highlighted throughout this paper. The variances in wages between skilled and unskilled labor led to poor living conditions for the unskilled workers, who were not a genuine concern of the capitalist owners.<sup>19</sup> This inadequate housing problem continued in Paterson throughout the city's history and is one example of issues stemming from capitalist production. Once introduced in Paterson, capitalism provided a clear contrast between the agrarian existence of the villagers of Acquackanonk and the factory life of the impoverished S.U.M. laborers. It revolutionized social relations and transformed them. Although it quickly failed, the S.U.M. constructed the foundations for manufacturing in Paterson, literally with the canals, raceways, and mills used afterward. This capitalist economic base produced similar conflicts between capitalist owners and labor throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and at present in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Society ultimately terminated the enterprise in January of 1796 as the cotton mill and print shop were not producing profits, and the costs to keep it running mounted.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, hundreds of people left Paterson searching for work, and the area around the mill went from a bustling manufacturing center to a deserted worksite. However, the S.U.M. retained ownership of the mill and the water rights to the canals and raceways, so capitalism did not wholly abandon manufacturing in Paterson. The Society eventually leased out the empty mill and print shop, and Paterson would soon become the active center of manufacturing the original investors in S.U.M. had envisioned. Investors and capitalists would migrate to Paterson at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “manufactory officials took little, if any, responsibility for the conditions under which their employees lived.” Harris, “The Transformation of Ideology,” 12.

<sup>20</sup> Harris, 13.

century. By 1815, “a New Jersey census of manufacturing reported that Paterson had eleven cotton mills in operation as well as a card and wire mill, a rolling mill, and a sawmill.”<sup>21</sup> The construction of cotton spinning mills continued in Paterson as other ancillary industries that supported the mills, such as dye shops, machine shops, and bobbin shops, were also established. As a result, labor moved in to work in the mills and various businesses, and the city grew. The crucial detail was that capital in Paterson was in constant motion as industries succeeded or failed or were altered entirely from previous forms.

The city began to shift to the metal industries in the 1820s and 1830s once market problems ruined the domestic cotton industry. Paterson, once again, became a prosperous center for production but this time with metal commodities. Machine shops that worked with metal began to replace the old wooden textile mills as manufacturing in Paterson evolved into building railroad engines, train cars, and other metal materials, such as guns at the Colt factory. Started by Samuel Colt in 1836 near the Great Falls, the Patent Arms Manufacturing Company manufactured muskets, rifles, and the famous Colt revolver. Fitting with the theme of the constant motion of capital, that iteration of Colt’s company left Paterson in 1842. New owners converted the building to manufacture silk, allegedly one of the first in the United States. The site accommodated the production of silk goods throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries until it was abandoned entirely in the 1980s. The skeletal remains of the Colt factory near the banks of the Passaic River are still visible on Google maps.

This brief review of the industry evolution in Paterson examines the effects of labor and capital coming together into the capitalist mode of production. By removing the 1913 strike from this history, a singular event appears where the workers lost a specific battle with the capitalists.

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<sup>21</sup> Harris, “The Transformation of Ideology,” 22.

However, when placed in its proper historical context and connected to the development of capitalism, we see that it all led to that one moment in history in 1913 and continued long after. Paterson's first attempt at the capitalist mode of production quickly failed, but the foundations, in the form of the actual structures, were built. Capital moved into the buildings and eventually transformed the city into an industrial center. After problems with cotton imports in the 1830s, production changed to the metal/machine industry as the industrial revolution necessitated iron, steel, and other metal commodities. Capitalism, as Marx stated, constantly revolutionized “the instruments of production,” “the relations of production,” and “the whole relations of society.”<sup>22</sup> Technological advancements in silk production, along with instabilities in the economies of Europe regarding trade, motivated the emerging silk industry in Paterson in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Immigrants, mainly from Europe, arrived in more significant numbers in Paterson in the latter half of the century. As the technology in silk production advanced, the skills required to produce the silk commodities lessened, with the machines taking over much of the work. In earlier times, hand-woven silk was expensive, but less-skilled workers made cheaper silk products using machines as capitalism developed. Therefore, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the capitalist mode of production created the conditions in the silk-making process in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so one worker was producing twice the profits as before. As the workers protested this situation, capitalism was on the move once again as the capitalist owners of the silk mills searched for cheaper, less-skilled labor. These ruptures caused the silk industry to begin leaving Paterson for Eastern Pennsylvania, where there was a surplus of less-skilled laborers. The industry continued to move to other parts of the world, and at present, it is mainly in Asia, where silk working began thousands of years ago.

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<sup>22</sup> Frederick Engels and Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 7.

## Chapter 2

### *The Silk Industry Moves to Paterson*

With a long, established history of silk-making in Europe going back millennia, silk manufacturing eventually migrated across the Atlantic to the United States in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Paterson became a center in the United States for manufacturing silk products, many English silk workers settled in and around the area. However, the extensive migration of European workers and English spinning machines to the United States stemmed from a commercial treaty with France in 1860.<sup>1</sup> The Cobden–Chevalier Treaty was a free trade agreement that ended tariffs on certain trade items – wine, brandy, and silk goods from France, and coal, iron, and industrial goods from Britain. These cheaper French silk products combined with a high tariff on silk products imported into the United States in 1861 devastated the English silk manufacturers. The poor economic condition of silk production in England created the incentives for capitalists to develop a domestic silk industry in the United States.<sup>2</sup> The following section briefly reviews the establishment of the silk industry in Paterson in the 1860s, when silk began to replace most of the other manufacturing sectors. This movement of silk into the city highlights that silk manufacturing was not always the dominant industry in Paterson, so there should be no expectation that silk would remain in Paterson forever. This notion, expressed as the silk manufacturers abandoned Paterson in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is counterintuitive to the fundamental laws of capitalist production laid out by Marx. The following

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<sup>1</sup> Shichiro Matsui, *The History of the Silk Industry in the United States* (New York: Howes Publishing Company, 1930), 7, HathiTrust, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.c008793588&view=1up&seq=23&size=125>.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Golin, *The Fragile Bridge: Paterson Silk Strike 1913* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 16.

section emphasizes this fact as a considerable portion of the English silk industry relocated to the United States and settled in Paterson after 1860 as capital was in constant motion.

Paterson's silk mills were somewhat unique in the textile industry. The revolutionary new inventions and technology that deskilled labor in the other textile industries, such as wool and cotton, in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century came much more slowly for silk weaving. The silk mills required skilled labor for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While the implementation of power looms for cotton and wool occurred in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the development of the silk power loom did not appear until the 1870s-80s due to the delicate nature of silk. This later development allowed skilled silk workers to protect their jobs from unskilled laborers immigrating from Europe and elsewhere to the United States during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, in Paterson, the silk industry remained relatively small until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but a small foundation of silk manufacturing materialized earlier. Silk was reportedly first produced in Paterson in the 1830s by Christopher Colt, Jr., "who came to Paterson and set up a few silk looms in the factory where his uncle (Samuel Colt) made firearms."<sup>4</sup> After only a few months of production, Colt sold the machines to an Englishman, John Ryle. Paterson's silk production remained small for the next few decades while most of the silk industry remained in Connecticut in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>5</sup> However, technological advances in the production of silk continued into the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the years before the silk power loom, companies in the United States were patenting new methods of silk production. The Hemingway Silk Company first offered the ability to place

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<sup>3</sup> Golin, *The Fragile Bridge*, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Matsui, *The History of the Silk Industry*, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Matsui, 29.

silk on spools in 1849, making it possible to use a silk spool on a sewing machine. Sewing machine silk, which was three threads twisted together to strengthen it, was patented in 1852. However, even with the technological innovations, the significant difference between silk and the other textile materials was that silk was not being produced in nearly the same proportions in the United States as cotton and wool. Securing a reliable foreign supplier of decent quality silk at a low enough price for profits was a challenge. As the industry expanded, the importation of raw silk into the United States grew along with it. Once again, tariffs and duties, as well as finding skilled workers, would become a burden for silk manufacturers who “depended on a foreign supply of not only raw materials but of skilled labor.”<sup>6</sup> As we have seen how improvements in technology affect the necessary skill level of the workers, issues with the textile workers’ skills once again emerged in silk production. This conflict between skilled and unskilled silk workers would play a significant role in the silk strike of 1913 as the owners began moving their operations to Pennsylvania. The migration of the silk industry into Paterson in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was an example of the constant motion of capitalism: constantly fluctuating, transforming, and adapting to the point where nearly an entire industry crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search of higher profits. Market forces moved roughly everything: the laborers and even the machines. This example of capitalist motion was an early preview of the silk industry’s departure from Paterson and the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>6</sup> Matsui, *The History of the Silk Industry*, 31.

### Chapter 3

#### ***Before Paterson 1913: The Lawrence, Mass. Bread and Roses Strike of 1912***

The fact that the movement of capitalist society is full of contradictions impresses itself most strikingly on the practical bourgeois in the changes of the periodic cycle through which modern industry passes, the summit of which is the general crisis.

—Karl Marx *Capital*, 1873.<sup>1</sup>

While strikes were consistent in the United States throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, events that preceded the 1913 Silk Strike in Paterson garnered widespread attention aimed at labor conditions in the textile industry. One of the more notable examples was the absolute tragedy of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. The fire occurred in New York City in March of 1911 inside a textile manufacturing building and a total of one-hundred and forty-six people—one-hundred and twenty-three of them women with the youngest at fourteen years old—died with many leaping out of the windows to their horrific deaths to escape the flames. The workers had been trapped on the shop floor by their bosses, who locked the doors to discourage thefts and prevent them from taking breaks. The Triangle Shirt Waist Fire garnered national attention and exposed the horrible working conditions that textile workers, many of whom were women and children, endured. The massive attention led to the New York State government's formation of a commission to investigate working conditions in the factories. The commission found hundreds of businesses with thousands of employees who were in danger of suffering a similar fate as the deceased workers of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I of the Penguin Classics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 103.

<sup>2</sup> "Factory Firetraps Found by Hundreds," *New York Times*, October 14, 1911, accessed August 11, 2021.

A few months after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, a strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, began in January 1912, known as the Lawrence Textile Strike or, more famously, as the Bread and Roses strike. The workers inside the textile mills of Lawrence generally suffered from poor working and living conditions, so labor disputes were common. However, the specific event that sparked the Bread and Roses Strike was a new law that went into effect on January 11, 1912, which restricted the number of hours women and children under eighteen could work from 56 to 54. As a result, Lawrence's employers reduced the number of hours that all workers could work at their factories, thereby also cutting wages. Workers prepared for a strike in anticipation of the pay reduction confirmed on payday. Thousands of workers from the enormous wool and cotton textile mills walked out and went on strike.

Located on the Massachusetts/New Hampshire border, the city of Lawrence is approximately an hour's drive north of Boston, and Lowell, one of Massachusetts' more famous post-industrial cities, is a short fifteen-minute drive away from Lawrence. As with many manufacturing cities in the northeast, Lawrence's origin story was like Paterson's story. Although founded almost a half-century apart, manufacturing in Lawrence began as it did in Paterson with a group of investors who scouted an ideal location to build a textile manufacturing center. In the case of Paterson, a group of investors in the 1790s founded the Society for Establishing Useful Manufacturers and built the first mills on the Passaic River near the Great Falls. In Lawrence, in 1845, a group of investors named Boston Associates' chose "one of the few remaining waterpower sites along the Merrimac River" to build the first textile mills.<sup>3</sup> In the following decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Lawrence, the woolen industry continued to grow while advancements in the industrial technology of textile manufacturing transformed the working

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<sup>3</sup> Melvin Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World, Abridged Edition*, ed. Joseph A. McCartin (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 133.

population. Similarly, innovations in the instruments and methods of silk production also prompted the migration of less-skilled workers from Europe into Paterson. Improvements in the processes and machines in wool and cotton manufacturing reshaped the labor pool in Lawrence, resulting in less-skilled immigrants from Eastern Europe and other parts of the globe replacing many skilled workers from Western Europe in the 1880s and 1890s.

The textile mills continued to grow in Lawrence, so by 1912, the city had approximately 30,000 workers in the textile industry, becoming one of the top two producers in the country of woolens.<sup>4</sup> The largest employer, by far, was the American Woolen Company, as it controlled multiple locations in Lawrence such as the Ayer, Prospect, Washington, and Wood mills, respectively. Combined, the American Woolen company employed approximately 16,500 workers, with the other producers such as the Lawrence Dye Works, the Pacific Mills, the Arlington mills, and a few smaller ones, employing the city's remaining textile workers.<sup>5</sup> Labor was lured from Southern Europe to Lawrence with advertisements from the American Woolen Company that promised a prosperous life and great fortunes. However, the reality was that many workers received low wages, endured horrible working conditions, and lived in unsafe, crowded housing tenements.<sup>6</sup> Due to Lawrence's high cost of living, entire families worked in the mills to supplement the low wages of a primary breadwinner. Approximately half of the workers were women, and half of all the children aged fourteen to eighteen that lived in Lawrence worked in the mills.<sup>7</sup> In a socialist periodical from January of 1912, the strikers blamed their employers for

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Huber Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Tripp, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume IV: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 308.

<sup>7</sup> Foner, 309.

the working conditions and low wages that "broke up" their homes as their children "were driven into the mills," "strapped to machines," and denied a happy and healthy childhood.<sup>8</sup> The workers asked for better housing, clean and inexpensive food, and affordable clothing. Textile workers understood the ironic situation, unable to clothe themselves and their families due to low wages.<sup>9</sup>

Once again, Marx can help to understand the dynamics of the Lawrence strike. In *Capital*, Marx argued that the employer was "not responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them."<sup>10</sup> The conflict appeared to occur at the point of production, between the worker and the mill owners. Using Marx's dialectical approach, we see that they were both confined within the forces of capitalism. The owners of the mills in Lawrence, just as the ones in Paterson, were subjected to the laws of competition in the capitalist mode of production. The continuous search for cheaper labor and more profits translated to success and failure. Much like the workers winning their demands in a strike was considered a 'success.' This point of contradiction was the issue, just as it was in Paterson and anywhere else capitalism appeared. The laws of competition dictated that the owners must constantly improve or revolutionize the instruments of production to make more profits, which resulted in less and less skill needed to operate the machines or work within a new, faster system. As Marx wrote, "the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society."<sup>11</sup> The workers in Lawrence, for example, witnessed how

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<sup>8</sup> "Appeal and Proclamation by the Strike Committee," *New York Call*, January 24, 1912.

<sup>9</sup> Foner, 312.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, 92.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Engels and Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (New York: New York Labor News, 1908), 7. Kindle Edition.

the capitalist mode of production 'revolutionized' society, and the traditional family structure transformed from an earlier understanding. The workers criticized the capitalist for taking their children and depriving them of an education. In Paterson, it also changed the social relations of the family, from children working on their family farms to working in the mills instead of going to the S.U.M.'s Sunday School. These societal disturbances formed a base of discontent from which the specific grievances in Lawrence and Paterson emerged.

## Chapter 4

### *Comparing Lawrence 1912 to Paterson 1913*

The Lawrence strike was tied historically to the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913 because, in both cases, the workers organized themselves with the Industrial Workers of the World, or the I.W.W. Comparisons with the success of the Lawrence Strike and the failure in the Paterson Strike began almost immediately after the 1913 Paterson Silk ended. One instance was when a leading I.W.W. member who played a significant role in both strikes as an organizer and orator, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, spent a good portion of a speech given in January 1914, months after the Paterson Strike of 1913 had ended, explaining the distinctions of each strike. Flynn pushed back against the critics who disputed the union's tactics and strategies because of the failure in Paterson. The first main difference between the strikes Flynn pointed to was the sheer number of factories and small shops, an estimated three hundred, in Paterson. Flynn then compared Paterson to the situation in Lawrence, where the enormous American Woolen Company influenced the other large mills to follow suit after it settled with its workers first. Flynn also stated that many of the larger silk factories in Paterson owned separate annexes in Eastern Pennsylvania that did not strike and could manufacture their unfilled orders.

In Lawrence, factory owners did not have this advantage. They were in direct competition with other textile mills, so they could not afford the massive strike to continue for an extended period. The final comparison Flynn made analyzed the contradictions within the capitalist mode of production: the workers' struggle with the factory owners. Flynn pointed out that the demand for silk was high in 1913, so the pressure was on the smaller firms to give in to their workers' demands since they had "great liabilities and not very much reserve capital."

Nevertheless, the union could only guess how close these smaller firms were to bankruptcy while the owners' side "could always tell when our side was weakening" because it was more challenging to hide the workers' shortage of funds.<sup>1</sup> The amount of pressure on small shops coming from the giant mills and the capitalist market itself was, as we will see, debatable. Still, there is no denying that the totality of the capitalist mode of production and competition was the primary source of the pressure for every party involved.

A comparison between the Lawrence Strike and the Paterson Strike emerged from a strike flyer produced by Paterson workers. The strike flyer went into more detail on the pressure put on the smaller firms to refuse to negotiate with their workers to end the strike. The flyer titled, "Who has Paterson by the Throat?" stated, "the answer to this question is simple—a few big capitalists."<sup>2</sup> The flyer's message informed the silk workers of Paterson about the vast power of the capitalist owners and how this process of capitalism transformed trades such as silk-making from small operations, which often occurred in a home or shop, into massive global corporations. The flyer disclosed how larger companies would position powerful, influential politicians on their boards, or even as president of the corporation, to cultivate a built-in lobbying machine that worked with the state to ease regulations and prevent workers from gaining labor rights. The flyer stated that the estimated three hundred silk shops and mills in the city and the surrounding area heavily depended on the two prominent silk dyeing companies: the Weidman Silk Dyeing Company and the National Silk Dyeing Company. These companies were used as

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, "The Truth about the Paterson Strike" (speech in New York City on January 31, 1914), in *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology*, ed. Joyce L. Kornbluh (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1964), 216.

<sup>2</sup> LOCAL 152 I.W.W. leaflet, *Who has Paterson by the Throat?* in the Strikes: Paterson Strike Pageant of 1913, PE029, Box 16, Wagner Archives, Tamiment Library, New York University.

examples in the flyer to show their connection to international sources of capital and influential figures in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, across the country, and globally.

The flyer stated that “French capitalists” owned the Weideman Silk Dyeing Company, which employed two thousand hands in Paterson and had plants in other parts of the United States, Italy, and France. The flyer also identified John Griggs as the chief counsel of the Weidman company. A powerful politician and a very busy person, Griggs' previous occupations were as a New Jersey State Senator, Governor of New Jersey from 1896 to 1898, and the United States Attorney General from 1898 to 1901, serving under President William McKinley. Griggs was also a director of both the American Locomotive Company, Bethlehem Steel Corporation and served as the Chairman of the Paterson National Bank. At the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co., Griggs served as the corporation's president until it was reorganized as the Radio Corporation of America, or R.C.A. in 1919 when Griggs then acted as a counsel and general director until he died in Paterson, New Jersey, in 1927.<sup>3</sup>

The Weidman Silk Dyeing Company, a global company with powerful politicians like Griggs on the board, was a noteworthy example of the corporate developments occurring within the silk industry and especially when compared to some of the other silk mills in the area like the Doherty Silk Company and its founder Henry Doherty. Doherty, an English immigrant weaver from Macclesfield, England, started a textile company with one partner and a single loom in 1879 and would grow the company to eventually become one of the largest silk mills in the Paterson area. Therefore, the flyer highlighted a shift in the capitalist mode of production in Paterson. The striking worker learned that an international corporation, with French capitalist owners and a former New Jersey governor and United States Attorney General as its chief

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<sup>3</sup> *New York Times*, November 29, 1927, accessed July 19, 2021, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1927/11/29/118647328.html?pageNumber=27>

counsel, was positioned to replace the traditional 'American dream,' Horatio Alger-like story of Henry Doherty. The influential political figure backed by faceless, international owners replaced the small mill owner, and these powerful corporations were more challenging for workers to fight.

The flyer claimed that the smaller firms were willing to submit to the workers' demands, but the larger mills and corporations prevented an end to the strike because it benefited them if the smaller firms went bankrupt. It stated that "a prolongation of the strike will bring ruin to many firms and help the dye companies in their effort to dominate the entire industry."<sup>4</sup> If the smaller firms conceded to their workers' demands, the dye houses allegedly threatened them with disrupting the delivery of the silks to be dyed and rating products poorly to reduce the prices paid out. The flyer ended by stating that the workers were not the ones who controlled the situation in Paterson and were not preventing the end of the strike. It claimed that these large corporations blocked a settlement because they wanted to dominate the entire industry. The flyer was undoubtedly an attempt to push a favorable public opinion towards the workers and alleviate some public pressure to end the strike without winning any demands.

In *The Fragile Bridge*, Golin dismissed the flyer's claims as conspiratorial and downplayed the extent of actual power these few big silk companies held over the many smaller silk shops. Golin argued that it was not "a few big capitalists" who controlled the Paterson Silk industry because "all the manufacturers were small by national standards in 1913."<sup>5</sup> However, focusing on the exact amount of pressure that the 'big capitalists' were putting on the smaller ones to keep the strike going missed the more significant point that the flyer was trying to make.

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<sup>4</sup> LOCAL 152 I.W.W. leaflet, *Who has Paterson by the Throat?* in the Strikes: Paterson Strike Pageant of 1913, PE029, Box 16, Wagner Archives, Tamiment Library, New York University.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Golin, *The Fragile Bridge: Paterson Silk Strike 1913* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 74.

The large dye houses in Paterson were the early stages of the massive international corporations we see today in the global capitalist economy, so quibbling over the exact amount of pressure they could put on the smaller firms to keep the strike going was irrelevant to the larger historical picture. However, this picture might not have been as clear for Golin in 1987 as it is today. Golin argued that there was "no huge company or companies" in Paterson like the American Woolen Company in Lawrence for the striking workers to face head-on. Although I have some disagreements with Golin's overall analysis of the flyer, his conclusion was exactly right. Golin stated, "practically the only thing they could agree on (all 300 of them) ... was the necessity of retaining complete control of their businesses and of keeping them free of unions."<sup>6</sup> In the end, the large companies and the smaller firms put aside whatever competitive forces that drove them and fought the workers in solidarity to prevent interference from the unions inside the capitalist production process.

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<sup>6</sup> Golin, *The Fragile Bridge*, 73-74.

## Chapter 5

### *The Aftermath of Lawrence 1912*

The I.W.W. was the critical entity that connected the Lawrence Strike to the Paterson Strike. The major I.W.W. history books, Philip S. Foner's *History of the Labor Movement in the United States Volume 4: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917*, and Melvyn Dubofsky's *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* devoted chapters to both strikes. The strikes were significant events in the relatively short history of this early 20th-century iteration of the I.W.W., which is still around today. Founded in 1905, the I.W.W. reached a pinnacle of success after the successful 1912 strike in Lawrence, but that popularity quickly began to decline after the momentous failure in Paterson. Critics of the I.W.W. blamed the strike leaders for the loss because they did not adjust their tactics and strategies from Lawrence to Paterson. Critics argued the I.W.W. refused to allow settlements between strikers and individual manufacturers and alleged that "they (I.W.W.) aligned the entire industry against the strike and promoted the solidarity of capital while rupturing the ranks of the strikers."<sup>1</sup> This debate over the best strategy to defeat the over three hundred individual silk owners continued well after the strike had ended in 1913.

What happened to the cities of Paterson and Lawrence in the following decades after the strikes raises the question concerning the use of success and failure when it comes to labor strikes. The economic effects on the city after a strike victory or a loss were debatable. On one side, historians blamed the silk workers of the Paterson Strike of 1913 for the flight of silk

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<sup>1</sup> Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume IV: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 369.

manufacturing from the city in the following decades.<sup>2</sup> The success of the Lawrence strike prevented similar scrutiny because the owners and the workers reached an amicable resolution to their strike. However, manufacturing ended up leaving Lawrence like Paterson. A dissertation investigated the conditions in Lawrence after the manufacturing flight in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Similar circumstances enhanced the comparisons between the two cities of Paterson and Lawrence. Lawrence was "struggling with a demolished tax base, overcrowded and deteriorating housing, white residential flight, an exodus of industry and retail, high rates of poverty and unemployment, failing schools, political corruption...gang violence," along with other similar issues as Paterson after manufacturing deserted the city.<sup>3</sup> Paterson continues to experience many of these same issues in the present. By analyzing Lawrence in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can contemplate that a strike victory in 1913 would not have changed the conditions of Paterson.

Tripp argued that the 1913 strike in Paterson was one of the causes of the downfall of manufacturing. However, when we analyze Lawrence, similar dynamics affected that city even though, from the workers' point of view, the 1912 strike was a success. For example, even with this enormous victory in Lawrence, which garnered national attention and made the I.W.W. a recognizable name worldwide, union membership in the I.W.W. quickly dropped almost immediately after the strike. In the decades that followed 1912, the manufacturing plants that employed tens of thousands of people left Lawrence, mainly after World War II in the 1940s and 1950s. Similarly, manufacturing fled Paterson, and much of the United States, searching for

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<sup>2</sup>Ann Huber Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 241.

<sup>3</sup>Llana Barber "Latino Migration and the New Global Cities: Transnationalism, Race, and Urban Crisis in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1945-2000," (PhD diss., Boston College, 2010), 3.

cheaper and more easily exploitable labor. The factors that led to the downfall of manufacturing in Paterson were similar in Lawrence, even though the city seemingly experienced a huge victory for workers, which did not happen in Paterson. Therefore, this proved that capitalists would leave an area simply because that is what capital does, whether labor and capital are working together or at each other's 'throats.' As this paper shows, it happened throughout the history of Paterson.

Although the commodities produced in the individual cities were different, the workers in the textile factories of Lawrence voiced similar grievances as the silk workers of Paterson. In Lawrence, the capitalist owners of the textile factories introduced what was called a "premium, or bonus system," where workers needed to "speed up" production to receive more money. As part of this plan, overseers and managers were paid extra according to the workers' output they supervised. The workers were compelled not only by their drive to make more money in bonuses, but the incentivization of the overseers was to push the employees under their supervision to produce more and more in less time.<sup>4</sup> The workers' main grievance with bonuses was that they would be paid after four weeks but on the condition that they did not miss even one day during those four weeks. Whether the absence was from sickness or even something like their machine breaking down, the worker would lose the exclusive bonus. In general, the horrible working conditions in each industry were similar. Workers faced extreme temperatures in factories of freezing weather in the winters and extreme heat in the summers. Many workers used chemicals and dyes for the fabric and faced overall exhaustion from the long hours of a monotonous routine.

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<sup>4</sup> Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 312.

Flynn maintained that the reason for the success in Lawrence was because the workers were striking against a few huge employers. In the Lawrence Strike, it was easier to negotiate and settle with the one big mill, the American Woolen Company, which, in turn, made it easier to do the same with the other mills later. However, in Paterson, which had around three hundred separate manufacturers, it was harder to negotiate with all the different interests of each employer and employee. Also, some of the more prominent employers in Paterson owned factories in Pennsylvania that could fill missing orders. The owners in Lawrence, who were eager to get their workers back in the factories and produce profits, did not have such an advantage and competed with the other big textile manufacturers in the surrounding states.<sup>5</sup>

The aftermath of the strike in Lawrence was a victory for the workers and the I.W.W. The I.W.W. gained notoriety, which created a scenario for the Paterson silk workers to invite them to lead their strike to achieve a similar victory. The workers of Lawrence gained a wage increase for all employees, overtime, an end to discrimination of any worker, and “reforms in the premium bonus system.”<sup>6</sup> The aftermath of the Lawrence victory juxtaposed with the failure in Paterson created a new lens to view this idea of success and failure. For example, partial blame for the city's downfall and manufacturing flight pointed to the 1913 Paterson Strike as the city gained a reputation of being “a hotbed of revolutionary sentiment.”<sup>7</sup> Membership in the I.W.W. when the strike started in Lawrence in 1912 was about sixteen thousand workers. By the summer of 1913, the I.W.W. could only claim seven hundred members in their ranks. Also, retribution

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “The Truth about the Paterson Strike” (speech in New York City on January 31, 1914), in *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology*, ed. Joyce L. Kornbluh (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1964), 216.

<sup>6</sup> Melvin Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World, Abridged Edition*, ed. Joseph A. McCartin (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 147.

<sup>7</sup> Ann Huber Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 241.

from the owners in Lawrence played a significant role in eliminating the most prominent union members from their factories. However, overall, would it have mattered if the strike in Lawrence were a failure? The owners understood the conflict with labor and were constantly working to keep as much power as they could for themselves. For example, the owners in Paterson were already in the process of moving their operations out of Paterson to avoid confrontations with organized labor. After the victory in Lawrence, owners chose to force the unions out instead.

The cultural memory of the strike of 1913 persisted for decades in Paterson. In the 1970s, a local Paterson newspaper partially blamed the decline of manufacturing in Paterson on the 1913 strike and the myth that developed around violent, revolutionary workers.<sup>8</sup> However, this claim lacked the hindsight we have today as many cities in the United States experienced a flight of manufacturing during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By looking at similar strikes, especially ones historically paired with the 'failure in Paterson,' we can see that the flight had more to do with the systemic motions of capitalism and less to do with one event in 1913. After a successful strike in 1912 and the city's subsequent economic decline, the flight of manufacturing in Lawrence supports this idea.

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<sup>8</sup> Tripp, 241.

## Chapter 6

### *Labor Conflicts Continue in Paterson*

The extortion of surplus-value from living labour means a struggle by the capitalists to lengthen the working day, to increase the work-load of the workers without increasing wages, to appropriate for capital all the benefits of increased productivity of labour. Conversely the struggle against capitalist exploitation means, for the workers, a struggle to reduce the working day without any reduction of wages, a struggle for cuts in the workload, a struggle for increased real wages.

—Ernest Mendel, Introduction to *Capital*, 1976.<sup>1</sup>

As the workers of Lawrence resolved their successful strike in March of 1912, the struggles over the loom system, wages, and working conditions in Paterson were underway. These ongoing conflicts would eventually lead to the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913. The battle between the owners and the workers of Paterson was a long, continuous event, which, at its core, was an expression of the fundamental contradiction within the capitalist mode of production. However, the direct point of contention that preceded the 1913 strike was an alteration in the silk manufacturing process. In their efforts to speed up production and cut costs, the owners of some silk mills began to install a new four-loom system for silk weavers that would replace the conventional two-loom system that had been in place. One of the significant advancements was the ability for workers to halt the loom when a thread broke, called "filling stop motion." In 1905, engineers implemented another invention that automatically paused the loom when the bound-up silk thread broke. These improvements made it easier for the weaver to work multiple machines as they no longer needed to focus on one or two looms in case the thread broke to stop them manually.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Mendel, introduction to *Capital: Volume I of the Penguin Classics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Golin, *The Fragile Bridge: Paterson Silk Strike 1913* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 32.

In Paterson, the disputes began when one of the giant silk mills, the Doherty Silk Company, owned by Henry Doherty, implemented this new four-loom system in 1910. However, the conflict remained small as the new system only affected one class of weavers initially. Doherty reached an agreement with the United Textile Workers (UTW), an American Federation of Labor-affiliated union. The U.T.W. was permitted to organize the skilled workers in the mill, and, in exchange, the U.T.W. would supply weavers who would work the new four-loom system. Initially, this agreement prevented any conflicts over the four-loom system. In September of 1911, the Doherty mill began incorporating the four-loom system with other weavers, triggering a workers' strike.<sup>3</sup> This 1911 strike, however, violated the owners' contract with the U.T.W., so the strikers were suspended, causing dissatisfaction to develop between strikers and the U.T.W. They accused the union of being more concerned with protecting its relationship with owners—appeasing capital—than it was in fighting on behalf of silk workers. This frustration caused workers to reach out to the I.W.W. for representation and to help them organize.<sup>4</sup> The silk workers' grievances revealed a growing class consciousness regarding the capitalist mode of production. The factory owners' installation of this new technology with the new loom system radicalized the strikers. The owners expected a single weaver to manufacture on the four-loom system what would have previously taken two workers to produce with the two-loom system. The silk weavers rightly predicted that this new system would reduce the number of necessary jobs. Those weavers who remained employed would have to work twice as hard to produce more profit for the capitalist owners who would not raise the pay. This awareness led

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<sup>3</sup> Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume IV: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 353.

<sup>4</sup> Foner, 354.

the weavers to strike initially, but the organization of the workers at the time was insufficient and could not grow the strike to more silk workers in other areas. The constant revolutionizing of technology caused the conflict.

A strike flyer produced during the strike explained the plight of the workers. Titled, “Hungry Babies! Hungry Mothers! Hungry Men! Five Months on Strike at Paterson,” the strike flyer began with fiery rhetoric regarding the twenty-five thousand strikers that had been on strike since February 25, 1913. It detailed the silk strikers’ struggles with keeping their “class conscious solidarity” while “meeting violence, all forms of brutality, prison, and hunger” to improve their working conditions slightly. It described the makeup of the strike workers, their various backgrounds, and how diverse languages did not stop them from striking together. It also listed the workers’ main reason, which was to demand the abolition of the four-loom system “because the blood-sucking capitalist monster had gone beyond all limits in exacting speed...” The flyer stated that the workers previously worked only one loom, but looms kept being added. A breaking point for the workers was implementing the four-loom system, which was implemented a few years earlier at the Doherty Mill and caused a few flare-ups before the massive general strike of 1913.

The flyer also lists specific numbers for how much the worker produced and the amounts paid for their work with the two-loom system compared to the four-loom system. The weavers working two looms were paid \$3.45 for 30 yards of “musoline,” and with four looms, however, they can “hardly make 48 yards” and gain \$2.40. “This is the reason for the strike: the work increased; the wages decreased. And the greedy mill owners, never satisfied in their mad race for

profits were intent on continuing this process indefinitely.”<sup>5</sup> A striker reading this flyer while marching on the picket lines for five months understood that the capitalist extracted profits from their labor. They knew that the owners exploited the silk workers without ever having to read one line of Marx. The class consciousness was developing during the strike, but, at this point, the workers were without pay for a long time and quite literally starving. A strike alone could not resolve the conflict. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn argued that a strike must be revolutionary and win demands, as mentioned in the introduction. The developing class consciousness must carry over beyond the strike, whether the strike succeeds or fails. If not, a victory will be short-lived, as in Lawrence, or result in a devastating failure, as in Paterson.

In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Engels and Marx detailed the underlying causes of an uprising in the following quotation:

The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The unceasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious; the collisions between individual workman and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon the workers begin to form combinations (Trades' Unions) against the bourgeois; they club together...for these occasional revolts. Here and there the contest breaks out into riots. Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies...in the ever improved means of communication that are created in modern industry and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another.<sup>6</sup>

The end of the passage, “ever improved means of communication...place the workers in different localities in contact with one another,” was the missing step in Paterson. The spark of a working-class revolution, anticipated by I.W.W., never materialized even though the solidarity

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<sup>5</sup> Paterson strike leaflet, *Hungry Babies! Hungry Mothers! Hungry Men!* in the I.W.W. Collection, PE044, Box 2, Wagner Archives, Tamiment Library, New York University.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Engels and Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (New York: New York Labor News, 1908), 10. Kindle Edition.

with the silk workers of Paterson was impressive. Over twenty thousand workers from around three hundred businesses and across the spectrum of silk production were on strike for five grueling months. However, the strike did not spread to other areas even with the “improved means of communication” of 1913 that Marx could only have imagined possible in 1848. The workers in the silk mills in Eastern Pennsylvania did not join in the strike, and instead, they picked up the slack from the lack of production in Paterson. Golin claimed, “ironically, although the employers continually underestimated the strikers, their deeper respect for the militance of Paterson’s silk workers had led them to become as independent as possible of their employees.”<sup>7</sup> There was little truth to the notion that worker ‘militancy’ caused the downfall of Paterson. In hindsight, witnessing the manufacturing flight in the last three decades combined with automation, the ‘militancy’ appears more like a convenient excuse for the capitalist owners who are constantly searching for more profits.

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Due to advancements in silk fabric technology, handicraft production changed to a factory manufacturing system during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such is the case with capitalist production; the more the technology of the manufacturing process advanced, the more these machines reduced the skills required to work them. By 1885, as silk production continued to move into an industrial setting, workers from various stages of the silk-making process were forming labor unions in Paterson under the Knights of Labor, founded in 1869. The Knights of Labor experienced the pinnacle of its success during the early to mid-1880s. However, the downfall of the organization quickly followed in the late 1880s. As one of the earlier national labor organizations in the United States, the Knights of Labor were a precursor to the I.W.W. and

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<sup>7</sup> Golin, *The Fragile Bridge*, 188.

the American Federation of Labor, or A.F.L., and included in the histories of both organizations. The Knights of Labor were more like the I.W.W. because they invited all ‘producers’ to join the union. At the peak of their popularity in 1886, the Knights of Labor had nearly one million members but was practically defunct by 1888. During the organization’s decline, prominent national trade unions began organizing into the A.F.L.<sup>8</sup>

The U.T.W. formed within the A.F.L. in 1901 and first established a presence in Paterson in 1903 as Local 439. Tripp described Local 439 as a "body of highly skilled English-speaking silk workers."<sup>9</sup> Workers turned to the U.T.W. after the well-established unions in Paterson were rejected from joining the A.F.L./U.T.W. when contract negotiations in 1901-02 failed.<sup>10</sup> The Loomfixers' and Twisters' Benevolent and Protective Association, the Horizontal Warpers' Benevolent Association, the United Ribbon Weavers of America, and the United Broad-Silk Workers' Union were all denied entry into the U.T.W. as separate, independent entities. As a result, the workers in those organizations joined the U.T.W. instead. Therefore, the U.T.W. continued to grow in the city and eventually created two more locals in Paterson. These three locals in Paterson were some of the strongest in the whole U.T.W. by 1909.<sup>11</sup>

Unions like the U.T.W./A.F.L. organized workers by craft or where they fit in the process of manufacturing. In Paterson, silk workers formed many different alliances, each of which corresponded with a stage of silk manufacturing, such as weavers, twisters, loomfixers, warpers, dyers, dyers helpers, etc. The U.T.W. was initially concerned with organizing only the skilled,

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<sup>8</sup> Melvin Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World, Abridged Edition*, ed. Joseph A. McCartin, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ann Huber Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 37.

<sup>10</sup> Tripp, 36-37.

<sup>11</sup> Tripp, 38.

'English-speaking' silk workers, thereby excluding immigrant workers, which was a common practice by the A.F.L. for most of the trade unions they represented. The philosophy of the A.F.L. was to offer an alternative to the labor radicalism of the previous decades. The workers the A.F.L. represented were "satisfied with the status quo," and the organization "became one of the strongest defenders of the American system."<sup>12</sup> They were content if the A.F.L. continued to fight for better pay and working conditions for them and them only. The I.W.W. formed from this large pool of labor that the A.F.L. excluded.

The rise of the industrial working class in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century created the conditions for this labor conflict between industrial unions and the craft unions. In the book *Conflict with the A.F.L.: A Study of Craft Versus Industrial Unionism, 1901-1938*, James O. Morris defined the difference between an industrial union and a craft union. An industrial union accepted all workers in an entire industry but limited, in some cases, to that industry. On the other side, a craft union admitted only workers who possessed skills within a specific trade. The craft union remained unbounded by the industry but would not accept workers outside of the trade. For example, a carpenter can work in any industry, but the carpenters union will only accept carpenters as members. Morris pointed out that "craft unions were not, in any absolute sense, inflexible in form" but "could not absorb the unskilled and semiskilled workers without changing their essence, and this they did not, in most cases, do."<sup>13</sup> As workers moved from their workshops to the factory, capital's goal was to restrain labor's power through division, and the A.F.L. helped with this project.

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<sup>12</sup> Melvin Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> James O. Morris, *Conflict Within the AFL: A Study of Craft Versus Industrial Unionism, 1901-1938* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1958), 2-3.

A large pool of unemployed, low-skilled workers, what Marxists refer to as the “reserve army of labor,” depressed workers' power and wages. As a result, some craft unions excluded this group of workers. In the previous production model, individual guilds often divided workers among their professions, and the craft unions that emerged with the rise of capitalism divided workers along similar lines. Many of these trades, such as silk weaving, were eventually excluded from the skilled craft unions as the advancements in technology deskilled those jobs. In other words, technological advances in machinery reduced the necessary skills of the worker as capitalism connected the worker and the machine. Ernest Mendel, in the introduction to Marx’s *Capital*, described this process in the following quote. “With the industrial revolution and the emergence of the modern factory, this process of the submission of labour to capital in the course of the process of production is rooted, not only in the hierarchical forms of labour organization, but in the very nature of the production process itself. Inasmuch as production becomes mechanized, it becomes reorganized around machinery.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, as technological advancements reduced the required skills to produce the silk products in the silk industry, the worker was bound to the machine.

This process occurred with silk making as it did with most of the old craftworking industries. Along with the consistently evolving silk manufacturing process, factory owners hired less-skilled immigrant workers from other parts of the globe to fill up the silk factories of Paterson. Even though the industrial workplace had changed dramatically, the A.F.L. continued dividing labor according to craft to protect the status quo. The I.W.W., conversely, was formed to organize the masses of workers who were excluded from union membership by this divide. They understood that the capitalist mode of production exploited the less-skilled workers the

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<sup>14</sup> Ernest Mendel, introduction to *Capital: Volume I of the Penguin Classics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 34.

most if they were not in a union. These workers required a union that would represent them, so the I.W.W. asserted at their founding convention to accept "any wage earner...regardless of occupation, race, creed, or sex."<sup>15</sup> In the group's manifesto, written in January 1905 at that founding convention in Chicago, similar issues with the new industrial labor force emerged. "Trade lines have been swallowed up in a common servitude of all workers to the machines which they tend. New machines, ever replacing less productive ones, wipe out whole trades and plunge new bodies of workers into the ever-growing army of tradeless, hopeless unemployed."<sup>16</sup>

This shift of workers moving into the capitalist mode of production is at the heart of Marx's writings. The theory asserts that constant motion creates these conflicts and contradictions between the worker and capitalist owner. The silk workers of Paterson experienced the revolutionizing of the instruments of silk production. Still, alas, they realized that they were powerless to stop it with the strike's failure. Workers must confront the mode of production in its totality because the capitalist mode of production will never stop until a new mode of production replaces it. As Marxist theory asserts, "capitalism itself is a product of history. It will perish in due course as it once was born. A new social form of economic organization will then take the place of the capitalist one: it will function according to other laws than those which govern the capitalist economy."<sup>17</sup> However, until that happens, workers continued to engage with the struggle.

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<sup>15</sup> Joyce Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology*, ed. Joyce L. Kornbluh (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1964), 3.

<sup>16</sup> "I.W.W. Manifesto," *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology*, ed. Joyce L. Kornbluh (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1964), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Ernest Mandel, introduction to *Capital*, 13.

The I.W.W. had been trying to gain a position with the Paterson silk workers shortly after its founding in 1905. However, the AFL-affiliated U.T.W. was a significant obstacle for organizing the silk workers. The disputes over the loom systems and the top-down tactics of the U.T.W. caused discontent among workers in the union. Still, many workers were not allowed in the U.T.W., and these workers sought union representation. The workers witnessed this division and developed a class consciousness. They realized their strength derived from their large numbers and the ability to strike without the U.T.W. locals separating them. The workers wanted a union that would fight for them, allowing them to make their own decisions democratically. The U.T.W. process of calling a strike in Paterson involved a Textile Council that had each local provide five delegates that would have to vote to approve a strike, and that vote would go to the national office of the U.T.W. for final approval.

Founded in 1905, the I.W.W. was still a relatively new organization in 1913. The I.W.W. competed with the Paterson branch of the A.F.L. to win workers over to their brand of industrial unionism. Before the founding of the I.W.W., the strategies and tactics of the A.F.L. and craft unions were the main dispute that caused some prominent labor leaders, such as Eugene Debs and "Mother" Mary Jones, to acknowledge the need for a new approach to organizing workers. They sought to form a more revolutionary union than the American Federation of Labor with its conservative approach and emphasis on craft unions and skilled labor. Debs stated that "modern industrial conditions required a modern type of unionism," which would fight for workers' rights as part of a larger class struggle. Debs believed "that the A.F.L. could not be quickly converted" into this new type of industrial union, so industrial workers needed a new organization.<sup>18</sup> The I.W.W. sought to organize all workers under One Big Union. A union that admitted unskilled

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<sup>18</sup> Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 13-14.

workers, many of whom were immigrants, Black, Asian, etc., from across all industries and craft distinctions; workers who the A.F.L. and its longtime leader, Samuel Gompers, primarily rejected. The approach of the A.F.L. was to work with capital whenever possible and support and protect the skilled craft labor pool while leaving the rest of the workers to face the ravages of capitalism on their own. There were factions from the Socialist Party who believed they could reform the AFL from within the organization. However, this approach often had the opposite effect. It led to some Socialist politicians becoming less radical and more conservative to win votes from the members of the A.F.L. who supported and benefitted from the status quo.<sup>19</sup>

The A.F.L.'s approach was to work with owners or the capitalists to reduce conflict and maintain the capitalist mode of production. On the other hand, the I.W.W.'s methodology was to meet the owners at 'the point of production' and spread the movement against capitalism to as many workers as possible. They believed this was a better approach than dividing the strikes according to the various stages of a given production process or even a specific industry like some industrial unions. For example, the craft unions would have a section of workers on strike while the rest walked right past them into the factory without issue because they were all "union men."<sup>20</sup> There was little to no solidarity between the craft union memberships, and the I.W.W. wanted to change this approach where any worker could join without discrimination for any reason. In the case of the general strike in Paterson, the workers at the estimated three hundred factories and shops were from various backgrounds, skill levels, and positions within the silk-making process, such as a dye maker or a weaver, were reliant on this working-class solidarity to have any chance at improving their working conditions.

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<sup>19</sup> Foner, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Robert Conlin, *Bread and Roses Too: Studies of Wobblies, Contradictions in American History Number One* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Corp, 1969), 15.

In the overall development of capitalism, the decades leading up to the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913 were significant to labor history and, consequently, applicable to this paper. The constant motion of capitalism stimulated the entire manufacturing system in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Marx worked on the main ideas in *Capital*. Modernizing technology and new manufacturing methods caused workers to search for jobs, many immigrating into the United States and the silk mills of Paterson. The old ways of organizing skilled workers into craft unions proved inadequate, and worker unification needed a new, modern method. However, the necessity for the change in tactics alone and even the founding of industrial unions like the I.W.W. did not automatically guarantee success, as seen in the strike's failure in Paterson in 1913. The A.F.L.'s inability to adapt to this transformation in manufacturing resulted in the founding of the I.W.W. As the A.F.L. either ignored or were blatantly hostile to the 'unskilled' masses, the silk workers in Paterson reacted to the changing material conditions of production. They decided they needed to alter their relations to that production process. As Marx stated, "in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production... It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."<sup>21</sup> The silk workers of Paterson entered into the definite relation to production, but the implementation of the new four-loom system was entirely out of their control. The owners of the mills decided that the development of the production process, in this case, the four-loom system, was unavoidable. The owners and the worker, as Marx stated, entered this relation independent of

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<sup>21</sup> Karl Marx, preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1977), Accessed July, 9 2021. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>

their will, so there was no way to 'raise themselves above' these relations.<sup>22</sup> The implementation of the new system was not a sinister plot of the capitalist. It was the 'natural' function of the system of capitalism, and neither party had absolute control over it. As Tripp stated, "the four-loom issue, the spark which had ignited the general strike, was not simply another instance of exploitation...the owners of Paterson saw the strike quiet literally as a fight for survival."<sup>23</sup> Workers and capitalists were both subjected to the same fluctuations and alterations in the system.

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The silk workers of Paterson continued to hold strikes after the failure of 1913 as the struggle continued. Silk production continued to grow in the 1920s as demand for the product increased, which caused an overproduction of silk goods caused. This overproduction by silk manufacturers then caused irregularities in the silk industry. Increased competition caused silk manufacturers to invest heavily in their buildings and equipment. These investments, however, proved ultimately to be unnecessary, and prices dropped.<sup>24</sup> As a result of the price reductions, layoffs of silk workers, which usually occurred during slow months, increased. Employers laid off over fifteen thousand workers in the slowest month in 1925. The Paterson's silk owners were also still in the process of moving their operations to Pennsylvania. Larger factories continued to move to Pennsylvania, and the numbers of smaller shops, employing less than twenty-five workers, grew to seven hundred and thirteen in 1925. However, silk production in Paterson

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<sup>22</sup> "I by no means depict the capitalist and the landowner in rosy colours. But individuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories..." Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I of the Penguin Classics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 92.

<sup>23</sup> Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913*, 236.

<sup>24</sup> Grace Hutchins, *Labor and Silk* (New York: International Publishers, 1929), 20, HathiTrust, [https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b281103&view=1up&seq=24&skin=2021](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b281103&view=1up&seq=24&skin=2021).

declined in the smaller shops as the larger factories in Pennsylvania produced the bulk of the silk goods.<sup>25</sup> The motion of capital in silk manufacturing continued.

As help wanted signs went up looking for weavers to run six looms in the 1920s, most weavers in Paterson were working the three to four looms they had fought so hard against a few years earlier. Meanwhile, in Pennsylvania, “all the weavers were running four looms.”<sup>26</sup> This fact proved that attempts to stop the working of multiple looms in the 1913 strike Paterson were unsuccessful. The silk workers continued to confront similar issues as new technological advancements permitted owners to force workers to manage more and more looms. The workers faced threats of unemployment and lower wages which caused the continuous eruption of strikes in Paterson in the 1920s and 1930s. Labor issues and manufacturing flight ultimately led to much of the silk production leaving the city first, and then eventually the United States, in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>25</sup> Hutchins, *Labor and Silk*, 22, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Hutchins, 82.

## Conclusion

No single factor was responsible for the decline of the industry in Paterson. The general strike of 1913, however, played a role in the decaying process of the venerable industrial center. The New Jersey manufacturers had been threatened since the 1890s by their competitors in other states and might have been overwhelmed without the intrusion of the I.W.W., but the prolonged struggle of the weavers and dye-house workers in 1913 at least expedited the decline

—Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913*, 1987.<sup>1</sup>

This paper argued that the main factor that caused the flight of manufacturing and industry in Paterson was the capitalist mode of production as labor ‘threatened’ the silk manufacturers in Paterson since the founding of the S.U.M. mill in 1789. The success and failure, decay and growth, and constant upheavals were consistent themes in Paterson's historical development of the capitalist mode of production. Bound to the capitalist’s machines, workers moved in and out of the factories and mills throughout Paterson’s history. This constant motion made the impact of the strike of 1913 regarding industrial flight debatable. Hindsight provides us with the opportunity to see how manufacturing flight not only affected Paterson but cities and towns across the United States. We must take note that Tripp wrote this before the passage of the notorious trade agreements of the 1980s and 1990s with the rise of neoliberal economic policies. Policies in which the political impact of that manufacturing flight was possibly felt most clearly in the 2016 United States Presidential election. Labor ‘threatening’ manufactures, as Tripp wrote in 1987, is one of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism and began in Paterson in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Huber Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 241.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the S.U.M. completely transformed the village that would soon be known as Paterson from an agrarian economy to one of capitalist manufacturing. Investors planned the process from the beginning. They hired a director who then hired workers to build the mills, raceways, and other structures. Once the mill was up and running, the managers sought out skilled labor as workers immigrated into the once sleepy village to work inside the new cotton mill on the Passaic River. The new business experienced problems that soon began with making profits, and the remaining investors ended production at the mill and ended the employment of the workers. The S.U.M. was an early example of this flight of manufacturing in Paterson, and these issues would continue due to the constant motion of capitalism. The owners, who retained ownership of the mill and the raceway, permitted new businesses to form on the property for a price. The cotton industry began to grow once again in Paterson in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As the cotton industry started to fail in the United States due to competition with outside producers, mainly from Britain, industries converted to metal production in the 1830s and 1840s. Metal replaced the old wooden mills, and Paterson was Samuel Colt's gun manufacturing factory site. Factories in Paterson also produced locomotive engines and train cars during this period. Once again, the constant motion of capitalism transformed the city from cotton manufacturing to metal as the industrial revolution began. The city's population continued to grow with the industrial development, and workers began immigrating in larger and larger numbers in the mid-1800s. In a little over half a century from when the S.U.M. mill produced the first cotton textiles, the city of Paterson had transformed a few times. New industries moved in and converted the old mills and factories or simply built new ones. The mass movement of silk into the area in the 1860s was a great example.

Once again, issues with tariffs and imports, this time between Britain and France, caused many silk workers and silk machines to move from Europe to the United States. The silk industry in Paterson began to grow at this time, but the technology of the machines was not advanced enough for the owners of the means of production to hire less-skilled workers. The skills of the Paterson silk workers protected them for a time from the newer immigrants who began arriving in the United States in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1880s, the Knights of Labor formed. The union was established in Paterson and accepted less-skilled workers, and at the same time, new technology in silk manufacturing enabled the owners to hire less-skilled workers. We see everything was connected and, as Marx pointed out, in relation to one another: the owners, the workers, and the machines were all part of the capitalist mode of production. Those relations changed as the silk industry revolutionized the instruments of production. The owners searched for more easily exploited labor, and the workers sought out more pay, better working conditions, and stability in their employment. Workers in Paterson began looking to unions for protection from the threats of the owners.

Craft unions began organizing workers in Paterson from the old Knights of Labor groups at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The United Textile Workers union was formed within the American Federation of Labor and established a local in Paterson of mainly English-speaking skilled silk workers. The U.T.F. refused to allow the older silk unions to join as independent organizations, so the U.T.F gathered workers from those various unions and put them under their leadership. When the owner of one of the largest silk mills began implementing the new loom four-loom system in 1911, it disrupted the production process. Workers realized that they would be producing twice the number of products in the same amount of time, and the owners would soon lay off the workers who were no longer needed. At the same time, many of the owners were

moving their operations to Pennsylvania, where a large labor pool of women and children were less organized and willing to work the four-loom system. The new technology within silk manufacturing made this move possible as the multiple looms required fewer skills to operate.

History connected the strike in Lawrence in 1912 to the 1913 Paterson Strike due to the involvement of the I.W.W. Significant differences between the two events resulted in the Lawrence Strike ending with success and the strike in Paterson failing. Lawrence was the home of a few massive textile mills and the American Woolen company being the largest. Once the strikers could force the American Woolen company to concede to their demands, the handful of other large textile companies in Lawrence followed. The estimated three hundred separate businesses in Paterson, ranging from large factories to small, family-run shops, made coordinating a successful ending to the strike was much more challenging. The larger and smaller firms refused to concede to the workers, and the 1913 Paterson Silk Strike failed. However, the struggle between labor and capital continued in Lawrence after 1912 and in Paterson well past 1913. Even with a successful end to the strike in Lawrence, membership in the I.W.W. plummeted after 1912. The large mills crushed the unions in Lawrence, and manufacturing eventually left the city after World War II just like it did in Paterson. The success in Lawrence in 1912 could not save it from the “decaying process” Trip mentioned when describing the flight of industry in Paterson. At present, both cities face similar issues related to poverty.

Steve Golin, author of *The Fragile Bridge: Paterson Silk Strike 1913*, stated that “one purpose of this book is to go back to Paterson so that we can get over it and move on.”<sup>2</sup> In Anne Huber Tripp’s, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (1987), the book ends with the

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<sup>2</sup> Steve Golin, *The Fragile Bridge: Paterson Silk Strike 1913* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 236.

theory that the 1913 Paterson Strike “played a role in the decaying process of the venerable industrial center” and the 1913 strike “expedited the decline” of the city of Paterson overall.<sup>3</sup> The decades provide us with hindsight by revisiting the history of the 1913 strike over thirty years after publishing these books. While it may have felt like it was time to move on in the late 1980s, the past decades of deindustrialization, automation, and outsourcing alters our interpretations of the 1913 strike in the present. Also, the ‘devastating’ effects from the singular event of the 1913 strike on the city of Paterson lessen when associated with the numerous cities and regions of the United States, such as the so-called Rust Belt, that experienced the same flight of manufacturing and subsequent decline in the populations’ standard of living. Many places across the country experienced similar results of manufacturing loss as Paterson, but how many of these places could lay part of the blame at the striking workers' feet?

In these instances, there seems to be a political desire for easy answers to these problems that do not require a dialectical approach that addresses the totality of capitalism. Like the strike of 1913, the flight of manufacturing from the United States, the most recognizable being the ‘Rust Belt’ in the 2016 Presidential election, was blamed on specific events, individuals, or groups, such as trade deals like NAFTA or President Bill Clinton. However, when the entire system of capitalism is analyzed using a Marxist lens and placed into a dialectical framework, we find that what happened to manufacturing in Paterson after 1913 occurred before 1913 in Paterson and continued long after. Similar conditions of the loss of manufacturing would eventually materialize all over the country. The singular event of the 1913 strike becomes less of a focal point when placed within a totality of the capitalist mode of production, one based around

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<sup>3</sup> Ann Huber Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 241.

the constant laws of motion of capitalism. As stated in the *Communist Manifesto*, “all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify.”<sup>4</sup> The city of Paterson experienced the capitalist laws of motion in the constant movement of manufacturing into and out of the city since its founding in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the production of silk would prove to be no different. However, what made it unlike the previous times was there was no new industry to replace silk. Paterson was one of the early manufacturing cities in the United States to experience the effects of outsourcing even though the mills only moved a relatively short distance to Eastern Pennsylvania. However, they would not stay there for long either and moved outside the borders of the country. The ‘new forms’ became ‘antiquated before they could ossify.’ Paterson was not a victim of the 1913 Strike. Paterson was a victim of capitalism in its totality.

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (New York: New York Labor News, 1908), 7. Kindle Edition.

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